

EXHIBIT 11
DATE 2/17/2011
HB 482

MWF Testimony on HB 482: Clarifying conservation and management responsibilities for wild buffalo & bison

Mr. Chairman, members of the House Fish, Wildlife and Parks Committee,

On behalf of the Montana Wildlife Federation, Montana's oldest and largest hunter/angler conservation organization, with over 7,500 members and 23 affiliated Rod and Gun Clubs across the state; we rise in support of HB 482.

MWF strongly supports HB 482. The time is right to restore bison to socially acceptable landscapes, while minimizing the conflict with livestock or agricultural operations. MWF supports the efforts of Montana to restore bison to a genetically viable, socially acceptable population. Nobody is claiming that bison would roam from border to border, nor do we wish to impact the state's agricultural economy. What we are asking for is the chance to work with our neighbors and fellow Montanans to draft a management plan that fits all needs. The current management scheme that Montana is operating under could easily lead to a Federal listing under the endangered species act, and remove control of our shared destiny. HB 482 creates the situation where these actions can be completed with everyone sharing space at the table.

As written, provisions in this bill protect livestock producers and agricultural operators. Do not be swayed by the false visions of bison roaming over hill and dale, rapaciously eating every blade of grass, or causing huge problems. Conserving bison means small steps, and this bill is a small step in the right direction.

In fact, this bill allows livestock producers to take bison that are on their property, and it forces FWP to design a management plan in consultation with livestock producers, hunters and others at the table. Furthermore, FWP is statutorily bound to minimize conflict between bison and livestock through fencing, hazing, and liberal take of bison that offend producers and landowners. MCA 87-5-711 and MCA 87-5-716 both commit the department to be a good neighbor. This bill is pro-private property rights.

HB 485 recognizes the inherent challenges and obstacles facing both livestock producers and bison conservation in a well thought out, and brings Montana closer towards recovering an iconic, culturally important species. As hunters, we stand in support of conserving wildlife. As conservationists, we fully embrace fair chase hunting as the primary method of wildlife management.

The opportunities presented through sensible, cautious bison conservation will benefit the general sporting public of Montana (which, at last count, was over 20% of all Montanan's). We ask for your support for HB 485.

Thank you for your service,
Ben Lamb / George Golie
Conservation Director for State and National Issues
Montana Wildlife Federation